

## Happy New Year, Amigo by edgy\_fluffball

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**Summary:**

Steve is expected to behave a certain way. He s expected to spend an evening with his parents at a dinner party, talking business. And he is expected to bring somebody to that dinner.

Since he can't bring Nancy, he has to change his plans a bit, asking someone who wants to be away from his family on New Year's Eve.

## Happy New Year, Amigo

### Author's Note:

Happy New Year to everybody, may 2018 be a year filled with wishes come true. I wrote this very sleepdeprived and it is a mess!

Still, I hope it finds some resonance!

‘Are you ready, Steven? Your father and I want to leave at four!’

‘No, Mum, I’m not ready yet. Why are you already stressing out, it’s barely noon!’ Steve looked up from his schoolwork and rolled his eyes at the closed door.

‘We’ll be in the car for more than three hours, Steven, and we really need to leave on time to make it until eight!’

‘Yes, Mum!’

His parents had told him to be prepared in case they wanted him to join them at the party they were to attend. He had deflected by talking about homework. A tiny part of his mind had hoped they would leave it at that. Hearing his mother from the hallway brought reality closer again, Steve was reminded of how he could not outrun the duties his father pushed onto him.

‘I just want us to be on time and prepared, Steven, can you understand that?’

‘Yes Mum, I get it and I appreciate telling me early enough,’ he got up and opened the door to let his mother in.

‘I thought you and Nancy would need a bit of time to get ready once your father had decided to take you.’

Steve stopped dead in his tracks, one hand stuck into his wardrobe, the other one holding the loose door back to keep it from hitting him in the back. He turned around to face his mother who smiled at him with the brightness of a sunray. She held a few folded up, ironed shirts in her hands that belonged in Steve’s dresser.

‘What do you mean?’ Steve turned around completely and ran his fingers through his hair.

‘Well, your father thought it could be boring for you on your own at this business dinner, so he notified the host that he would take his son and a companion. Isn’t that considerate?’ His mother practically beamed, and yet, Steve felt the infallible whirring swell in his ears that signified a freak-out.

‘Mum – Nancy and I broke up. Two months ago, did you not catch that? I know I told you, I even remember the day; it was two days after I got into that fight in November...you didn’t listen to me, am I not right? Tell me I’m not right!’

His mother did not manage to answer, instead she just stared at him, polo-shirts held out for him to take, her look at him empty. Steve sighed and took the clothes from her hands.

‘It’s okay, Mum. I shouldn’t have reacted that testily,’ Steve put the shirts and a single sock away.

His mother still stared at him when he turned back around from his dresser, her arms now hanging down her sides without purpose. She was already wearing the new jewellery she had gotten for Christmas, and her sequinned dress for special occasions, most of them being business dinners.

‘Where are we going exactly? Dad said we would visit friends?’

His mother seemed to perk up, ‘Chicago, Steven. We are invited to celebrate New Year’s with the Corveys, I don’t know if you remember them, they host a dinner every year. Your father got to do business again with Mr Corvey this year. His company re-joined the list of your father’s clients back in June but –’

‘– now Dad needs to keep making an impression in order to keep him as a client. I know the drill, Mum. Is that why you wanted me to take Nancy as well? Because a dinner would be too boring for me to endure on my own?’

‘Actually, son,’ his father entered his room behind his mother, two

ties in his hands, 'it's not a dinner. It's a party. We will stay overnight at James and Linda's, they were nice enough to offer us their guest room. Many of the big clients will be there and of course I was expected to attend as well, bring my family, and socialize.'

He turned to face the mirror Steve kept in his room, holding up the ties, examining them next to his shirt. A wrinkle formed on his forehead, he turned around again and handed the ties to his wife.

'You are bringing Nancy?'

Steve felt his blood rush in his ears, he could taste something sour in his mouth.

'I just told Mum, for the third time: we broke up!'

'Well, ask her anyway. She could use a few contacts outside of Hawkins for sure,' his father lifted a mustard yellow tie up to his chin and looked at his wife questioningly, 'I wouldn't let such a hiccup stop me from doing something for her, son.'

Steve swallowed dry, 'I can't, father. We broke up, she has a new boyfriend now – and you know that the Wheelers celebrate New Year's together with the Byers every year, anyway!'

'Well, I can't show up at the Corvey's with just my son, what impression would that make? Think of something, Steven, I told James I would come with your mother, you, and a companion for you. It is up to you to find someone that will come along to fill up the table we will be sitting at. Mrs. Corvey doesn't like empty chairs.'

Having said that, he left the room, leaving his wife to shrug apologetically. Steve could not bring himself to get annoyed. He knew the drill, indeed. First, his mother would suggest something seemingly private, something nice where they could maybe talk and spend some time together – then his father would come out with the truth. Usually, that meant business talks, duties to fulfil, and roles to play.

Still, he never gave up hope. Not once had he resigned and told his mother to save it, not once had he not even thought about the

possibility that this time, out of all the times they had come to him, would be the one time they meant for it to be family time.

‘I put your suit in the bath room, sweetheart, pick a nice tie for me and we are all set,’ his mother smiled at him, ‘and maybe you can still find someone to join us. Don’t you know someone who might want to get away from Hawkins for a night?’

Steve shook his head and dropped back onto his bed, ‘I’ll think about it and make some calls, Mum. Thank you for letting me know so early.’

He couldn’t hide the bitterness in his voice this time and his mother left, following her husband downstairs, without saying another word. Steve dropped onto his bed, covering his face with his hands. There was no way Nancy would agree to come to Chicago on New Year’s Eve to play happy family. There was no way Steve himself would play along in the scheme he had left years prior. Only his mother’s kind smile and the honesty in her eyes when she lied to him let him agree to their shenanigans whenever they came to them.

It was two before he rolled out of his bed and started to actively think of an alternative to Nancy. Tommy and Carol didn’t even cross his mind, the kids were too young and uncontrollable and every other person from school he could think of felt just out of place. None of them would be able to blend in with a cheery, colourful crowd; none of them would be able to carry on a conversation; none of them would be able to leave Hawkins’ greyness behind.

Except, there was one person, one person who hadn’t grown up surrounded by woods and gloominess, one person who possessed enough charm to bewitch a room full of stones – one person who would not be caught dead in the same room as Steve or a bunch of business people. He put a jacket on – the suit would only wrinkle – grabbed his car keys from his desk and made his way downstairs.

‘I’m trying to get a friend to go with me,’ he yelled down the hallway, where he suspected his parents were, ‘See you later!’

Speeding down the road, he thought of what he was going to do. There was a thin line between annoying his parents and risking his

life, and he intended to play on the factors that would either help or disrupt his plan, exploiting the grey area that opened up along the line. He turned the volume on his radio up, trying to block out the nagging feeling that he was doing something stupid.

When he pulled up in front of the simple house he felt his heart beat in his throat. He walked up the few steps to the front door, lifted his hand and knocked. He listened carefully, waiting for the faintest sound inside. Once he had heard steps he put on an expression that hopefully seemed bored enough for his cause.

He had never seen the man opening the door but Steve forbid himself to show any interest. Instead, he drawled a 'Hi.'

'And who are you?'

'My name's Steve. Steve Harrington. I'm here for Billy?' Steve had heard enough about Mr. Hargrove from Max to know he had to be careful, 'I wanted to ask if he might want to join my family for New Year's.'

'Well, Steve, in this household we celebrate together as a family. I am sorry but you will have to do without my son tonight.'

Steve didn't miss the edge in Mr. Hargrove's voice but he had a mission to accomplish. Uncowed he swayed on his heels.

'It's just this huge business dinner in Chicago. My Dad would like me to bring someone else in case he finally finds someone with an eye for the business – I guess I'm too big of a disappointment and he needs someone to shine. It's a lot of playing nice and making conversation, I just now that Billy is good at that stuff, and he might get some insight and contacts out of it...'

'And you thought of my son?'

'I'm on the basketball team with Billy. We talked a few times and he mentioned being interested in business transactions, and when my Dad approached me today, I thought of him. That's...why I'm here.'

Mr. Hargrove still eyed him suspiciously, 'He could go to Chicago with you and your parents, celebrate New Year's with a bunch of

businessmen, and establish contacts that might help even my useless son to gain a foothold in the professional world?’

‘All he needs to do is put on a suit and be ready at four, we will pick him up and –’

‘You are not going to tell him yourself?’ Mr. Hargrove crossed his arms over his chest, ‘He’s upstairs, in his room.’

He stepped aside, motioning for Steve to come in. His gaze followed him as he climbed the stairs and made his way to the one closed door in the hallway. Metallica blasted behind it. Steve swallowed dry. Facing Mr. Hargrove and lying to him seemed easy compared to what came next in his plan.

His knock went unnoticed, Steve opened the door and stepped inside the room. Again, he forced himself not to look around. A single moment of inattention could lead to a broken nose or worse, he reminded himself.

‘Harrington? Look what the cat dragged in – looks like the fucking queen of nitwits! Do you want to start the new year as the official –’

‘I’m offering you the opportunity to start the new year far away from your father, in Chicago. Also, it will piss off my father. What do you say?’

Steve had not felt certain about his plan before standing face to face with Billy. The surprised look the other boy showed on recognizing him, however, made it worthwhile. They stared each other down, both eager to come out on top.

‘You don’t like me, I get that,’ Steve felt like he was giving in, it pained him to be the one making the first move, ‘but Max told me a few things and I got the feeling that New Year’s with a bunch of strangers might be the more enjoyable option. Which is what I’m proposing, I guess.’

Billy didn’t respond but came closer. Steve cleared his throat, ‘Your Dad thinks we at least talk, don’t ruin that by decking me. May I explain?’

‘You went to my father first to ensure I wouldn’t get to you? That’s actually cleverer than I had expected from you.’

Steve chose to ignore the hidden insult, ‘My parents attend a party in Chicago tonight. There will be mostly clients and possible future clients of my father’s, he told me to come and take someone else as well. Since I do not intend to just be meek and mild about it, I thought of you. It’s a win-win-situation really, I get to annoy my parents by taking the worst imaginable companion, and you get to stay away from your father for a night.’

He crossed his arms over his chest, waiting for a reaction from Billy. For a moment it seemed like he was waiting to no avail. The reaction he got in the end was the one he had not expected: Billy barked out a laugh, deep and raspy, with an edge to it that had Steve shuddering.

‘Not bad, Harrington, not bad at all. I’m impressed, honestly – who would’ve thought King Steve to be such a manipulative piece of shit!’ Billy had cornered him but Steve refused to be intimidated.

‘What do you say?’

Billy looked at him in silence for another twenty seconds, Steve started to count in his head to keep himself occupied without worrying about what could happen next. Then, he stepped back suddenly.

‘You want to piss off your parents, pretty boy? What do you need me to do?’

Steve could just barely hide his sigh of relief, ‘My parents want to leave at four from my house, can you be there on time with things for one night? Also, as it is a pretty fancy event, a suit would be appropriate, sensible shoes and maybe not the leather jacket. Also – button your shirt up, will you?’

‘Funny, Harrington, now who would have thought that?’ Billy licked his lips, grinned and nodded towards his wardrobe, ‘I guess I’ll be seeing you at four.’

Steve took his leave after that, he passed Mr. Hargrove on his way



out and slowed down for a moment.

‘If Billy could be at my place at four, that would be good. I’ll give him a lift tomorrow morning. Have a good night and happy new year,’ he repeated and smiled at Neil Hargrove, ‘Nice to meet you, Mr. Hargrove.’

He extended one hand that the man shook, then Steve returned to his car. Once he sat behind the wheel he felt himself relax a bit. He had survived something Max had called ‘a disaster’, a visit at the Hargrove’s. Even more, he had a companion for the Corvey’s New Year’s-Party that should be the talk of the party. Maybe Billy was even more interesting that his own plans for the future, which Mr. Corvey liked to discuss in front of him with his father, but without Steve’s participation.

His mother was already waiting for him when he arrived back home, fussing about the time remaining and the still missing companion. Steve warded her off by locking himself into the bath room. He needed to take a shower and do his hair before Billy came over.

He finished up just before four by pulling his heavy wool coat on. The last thing he did before leaving his room, was double-checking his looks in the mirror. He had opted for the usual for an occasion like this, his hairdo a little tamer than at school but with a few extra curls because he hadn’t followed through on his whole blow-drying procedure, leaving the few baby hairs in his neck to air dry, curling in the progress. Before he even saw his mother standing at the door he could hear her talking to someone. Steve hurried downstairs, prepared to explain how he came to be friends with someone like Billy – but then, one glance had him stop dead in his tracks.

He hadn’t seen Billy with carefully combed hair before. It had lost its usual, dull appearance and unkempt look. Instead, he had slicked back his curls into a quiff with one strand dangling down at his temple. Even his clothes looked different from anything Steve had seen him wear, the evening of their collision had been as close to Billy looking smart as possible for Steve to imagine. He was taken aback by what he saw now. The first thing he noticed was the lack of skin showing. Billy had buttoned up his blue shirt up to his neck. His jacket looked a bit too wide for him; Steve suspected it belonged to

his father initially.

‘Oh Steven, there you are,’ his mother plucked something in place on her head, ‘I just opened the door for Billy. Isn’t it nice to have him as well? You will have a playmate tonight!’

Steve just smiled weakly at her remark and set about getting his mother’s fur coat.

‘Please, let me,’ Billy smiled and relieved Steve from the coat, ‘this is a very nice fur, Mrs. Harrington. Is it mink?’

He left Steve standing in the middle of the foyer, offered his mother his arm, and led her outside, towards the car. Steve gaped at the sight, suddenly doubting his great idea of coaxing Billy into attending the Corvey’s party. Of course, he had heard about his charm and enchanting nature, but seeing it made a difference. He followed Billy and his mother outside.

To mark the occasion, his father had gotten the Porsche cleaned up and good to go. It got cosy inside the sports car, Billy and Steve had to squeeze their legs in the small gap between the seats to fit in. Steve heard his mother switch on the radio as soon as they had left Hawkins. His father preferred a drive in silence with nothing but the engine to be heard, whereas his mother would not drive longer than one hour without white noise in the background.

On this particular day it might have been the dead silence in the backseat as well. She turned the volume up on a particular song and began to sing along.

‘You’re from California, aren’t you, Billy?’ she asked, turning her head back to them, ‘Isn’t this fitting?’

“California Dreamin” blasted through the car as they drove towards Chicago in silence.

Steve dared to look to Billy’s side once, regretting it immediately. He spotted something like sorrow, sadness or longing, but couldn’t pinpoint which one in particular. Billy leaned his head against the window and looked out in the increasing darkness. To Steve it was

obvious that Billy had not intended to be confronted with memories of California in any way on this evening, suddenly feeling bad for having caused it. Billy looked sad and Steve felt guilt pinching his conscience. Maybe the idea of getting him away from his father, even for one night, had not been the grand solution he had hoped for.

His own problems re-surfaced forty miles from Chicago. Waiting for it had made the otherwise eventless drive keep him on edge. With every exit they didn't take, every street sign, Steve felt the impending obligations be lowered a bit more until his father looked at him in the rear view mirror.

'Steven,' more wasn't needed, Steve knew what came next. He lowered his head to show he was listening, 'You know well enough what is on stake today for the business. I will need you to make the best impression. Mr. Corvey knows you, he will want to talk to you about the future of our company. What will be your strategy?'

'I will agree to whatever he says, show interest in made agreements, and attempt to lure him into making further connections.'

'Attempt, Steven?'

'I will make sure he won't do business with anyone but us,' Steve replied automatically, 'Mr. Corvey will be pleased to hear that I will join the company soon.'

It hurt.

'What is your strategy with Mrs. Corvey and her bunch of cows?'

'Charms. She is going to be enchanted by my smile and pleasant conversation. If anything doesn't go according to plan, she will be telling her husband to do business with us. So will the other wives.'

'Good boy,' his father looked ahead onto the street, a satisfied smile on his lips, 'we can talk about your involvement in the company again once we get back. I might be able to get you started on more than an unpaid internship, if tonight turns out to be a success.'

Steve settled back against the window, exhaling quietly to not disturb the silence in the car. He felt lightheaded enough to almost miss his father's last remark, a cold, stinging reminder of who he had to be.

‘Just don’t disappoint and embarrass me again.’

Steve closed his eyes, a reaction wasn’t necessary and not what his father wanted to hear, anyway. He ducked his head away, out of the range of the rear view mirror. His father didn’t need to see the tears in his eyes or the pain in the corners of his mouth when he pulled them up into the smile his mother liked so much – although she never saw it these days.

A slight stirring let him wipe at his eyes furtively before looking back up. He turned his head slightly, letting a shadow cover his eyes. Billy met his gaze, his eyes widened and filled with surprised bewilderment. Steve held the gaze for a moment before resuming to watch the lights outside the car chase by. He didn’t want to see Billy realize why Steve had asked for him to join his family.

The Corvey’s lived in a mansion in the suburbs, Steve knew their driveway from prior business meetings he had been dragged to. Billy, however, stared at the house with little less than stunned amazement in his eyes.

‘You come here every year, Harrington?’ he asked and fell behind a few steps.

Steve joined him, cautiously looking up to the house and the lit windows, ‘Yes, Dad and Mr. Corvey have been doing business for a few years now. We just don’t get invited to the New Year’s party usually.’

Billy nodded along, ‘So that means that your father is now making a big step towards doing regular business with this man?’

‘He became a client last year. My father needs to keep him on his list of clients,’ Steve felt his hands start to shake, ‘We need to help him.’

Billy stayed silent until they had entered the house. Mr. and Mrs.

Corvey came to greet them, both dressed in the newest fashion trends, urging their housekeeper to take their coats. Even before Steve had been able to take it off, Mrs. Corvey already pinched his cheek, telling him how much he had grown and what a handsome young man he had turned out to be. She then moved on to his mother, assuring her that her son was just precious, a real gem, and surely popular with the ladies. Her double chin wiggled as she spoke and Steve felt the urge to flee before she would turn towards Billy.

‘Now who might that be?’

Steve cleared his throat, ready to introduce Billy, but his father was faster.

‘This young man here is William Hargrove, a friend of Steve’s. My son tells me he has an interest for the business and wants to sniff out possible contacts, if you understand what I mean,’ he laughed, his smile not reaching his eyes as he turned towards Mr. Corvey again.

‘Please, Mrs. Corvey – Billy is just fine,’ Billy grinned and kissed Mrs. Corvey’s hand, ‘You have a lovely home, Mrs. Corvey.’

‘Young man, you are behaving outrageously – one could think I were some kind of housewife! Please, let me show you the parlor. Bertie, take care of the Harringtons, will you? I seem to have found my piece of conversation for tonight!’

With that Mrs. Corvey dragged Billy away who smiled at her and continued to converse with her. She left Steve to her husband, Mr. Corvey motioned for him and his parents to follow him and fell in step with him.

‘Steven, your father tells me that you will join the company soon after graduating. Isn’t it wonderful to know your place in life is secure and already waiting for you?’ Mr. Corvey seemed to wait for Steve’s answer.

‘Yes, Mr. Corvey. It is a wonderful relieving feeling – and the prospect of working with such experienced and distinguished people as yourself is another motivator that cannot fail to impress me,’ Steve heard himself say scripted lines as if he had left his body to watch

from afar how he got to say the one thing he always said.

‘Great! Great, my boy, you will love the work world, don’t I always say that?’

With this Mr. Corvey turned around to his father. The ensuing conversation included talks about business, partners, and mutual interests, topics Steve hated – but while his mother could join the group of wives at the buffet, he had to stay behind to listen to his father, Mr. Corvey and every other business man present at the party.

They had hired a band that played a few nostalgic songs, once in a while one of the painted ladies dragged her respective husband off to dance, a duty most of the men fulfilled with their faces barely containing the annoyance of being pulled from the conversation. Steve looked around. The first men had taken off their jackets, Mrs. Corvey insisted on all chairs being occupied or at least covered with a suit jacket. He knew he wouldn’t get to sit down a lot, so Steve took off his grey jacket and hung it over the backrest of a nearby empty chair. Immediately, he felt more comfortable. At least, he thought, the Roths didn’t seem to have come, he wouldn’t have been able to be in the same room with them.

He caught someone’s gaze across the room. Nice, blue eyes looked at him with an expression of worry that seemed to dull their shine a bit. It took him a moment to recognize Billy who was still surrounded by the lonely, chattering wives. Steve felt his breathing quite presently, he had not yet been able to eat anything and his stomach felt accordingly. A fluttering spread through his stomach and Steve prayed he wouldn’t collapse. Nothing would infuriate his father more on this evening.

‘Excuse me, sir, but do you need Steve right now?’

Mr. Corvey looked up at Billy, his watery eyes blinking rapidly, ‘No, not at the moment. Although we are discussing quite an interesting matter right now –’

‘Oh I believe it is, Mr. Corvey. I had just hoped to get Steve to explain your wonderful buffet to me, I don’t speak French and am at a loss with the signage without him,’ Billy smiled easily, grabbed Steve’s

arm and dragged him away as soon as Mr. Corvey nodded.

‘Thank you,’ Steve mouthed as they made their way towards the buffet tables, ‘I owe you.’

‘Not quite, Harrington,’ Billy took a plate and began to load food onto it, ‘I just balanced out our equation. You got me away from my father tonight, I got you away from the business talk. Will they miss you?’

‘Not my father and Mr. Corvey,’ Steve stood next to him and sighed, ‘I have done my part. And this year, it went according to plan. Let’s get out of here!’

He opened the balcony door, relying on Mrs. Corvey providing a space for the smokers. And just as he hoped, a garden table and chairs stood in one corner of the balcony, an ashtray on the tabletop, and blankets had been placed over the backrests of the chairs.

‘Now this is what I call comfortable,’ Billy sat, setting his plate down in the process, ‘how often have you been here on New Year’s? You seem to know this place through and through.’

‘Dad started to do business with Mr. Corvey in seventy-six and has been invited over ever since. I was always there, a cute little kid to weaken any argument against my father. Even businessmen tend to be kinder around a child, apparently.’

‘He used your cuteness?’ Billy started eating, Steve nodded and dug in as well.

A moment later he stopped, staring at Billy, ‘Did you just call me cute?’

Billy chuckled, it sounded even softer than the voice he had used on Mrs. Corvey and her companions. He pulled his packet of cigarettes from his pocket, put one between his lips and lit it. They sat in silence for some time, finishing whatever they had on their plates. Once they had eaten what the Corveys had provided, Billy sat straighter, examining Steve opposite from him.

‘What happened?’

‘What do you mean?’ Steve sat back, trying to escape Billy’s gaze as far as possible.

‘Your father is a lot worse than mine when it comes to hiding something. You embarrassed him? What happened?’

Steve felt blood warm his cheeks. He tried to think of something to reply, a jaunty line, but Billy stared at him, not even batting an eye in the process. Then he leaned forward, cigarette dangling from his lips.

‘You had a reason to get me here tonight, didn’t you? Something went wrong the last time, and you had to start the year with the feeling of having disappointed father dear. What happened that made my presence not only bearable but almost required?’

‘I thought you would distract them all from the usual stuff. The wives usually talk down on me as if I was still five years old, then men are focussing on their business talks and I’m not able to make use of that. You are the new factor, something more interesting than Steve Harrington rejecting the chance of his life.’

‘What chance?’ Billy sounded breathless for a moment, he tapped the ash off his cigarette and took another drag before offering it to Steve, ‘What could you possibly reject at a dinner party?’

‘Last year we were here along with another family, close friends of both my parents and the Corveys. The Roths are a huge name in the business, have been for generations. They used to work closely with my father, until last New Year’s,’ Steve took the cigarette from Billy and took a drag, ‘They have a daughter, Patricia. She used to be the only other person my age at these conventions of business people. Mr. Corvey, Mr. Roth and my father watched us grow up and meet at the parties. Last year they decided it would be good for their companies, if Patricia and I would get married. They told her first, she was delighted. And the, at last year’s dinner party, they told me.’

‘Weren’t you going out with the Wheeler girl?’ Billy frowned, ‘And also, arranged marriage?’

‘I wouldn’t call it that,’ Steve fidgeted in his chair, ‘Patricia is a sweet girl but I saw her more as a sister than a potential partner. I also told



my father about Nancy but he wouldn't have it. I refused to dance with Patricia, didn't talk to anyone about business and apparently cost my father a few business ties. He has been adamant ever since. I am to join the business this year.'

'Do you want that?'

Steve looked up. There seemed to be a spark of interest in Billy's eyes, a spark that held curiosity and insecurity at the same time.

'No,' Steve heard himself say, 'no, I want to be a policeman. Working with Hopper would be nice, keeping the dickheads out of trouble. Looking after people.'

'Well, well, well, King Steve is a secret saint!' Billy whistled through his teeth, 'Who would've thought.'

'Don't mock me. You can make fun of whatever you like – just not of that,' Steve turned away, looking out over the city, all visible from the balcony.

He heard the chair scrape over the stone ground as Billy got up. Without another word the other boy walked past him, back into the parlor. He took their plates along, leaving Steve to sit in his shirt and waistcoat. For just a moment he felt disappointed. He had told Billy about that stupid dream of his, helping Hopper, looking after the kids, and he had been met with sneering. It was better than his last New Year's at the Corvey's, still better than seeing the disgusted look on his father's face whenever he remembered the moment his son had disgraced him in front of important business partners.

Steve shuddered. Chicago in winter could not be called pleasant and all he wore were a thin shirt and a waistcoat, even his jacket hung inside, and that was the last place he wanted to be at.

Sometimes it still hurt that both his parents forgot his presence and existence once he had played his part, said his lines and looked pretty. He still didn't give up hope. There would be a day, probably the one when he joined the business, when his father would look at him with different eyes. There would be a day when his mother would see him for what he hoped to be, a kind and loving husband

and father.

‘Here, I got us something,’ Billy’s voice jolted him out of his daydream, ‘this should be good. I had to flirt with one of the women but in the end I could escape again.’

Steve looked up and into Billy’s smiling face. He carried a bottle of champagne, glasses and a bowl of chocolate mousse along with spoons. After setting everything down, he pulled his chair around the table until it stood next to Steve’s. Their arms touched for a moment when he sat back down.

‘I thought we could have our own party out here,’ Billy handed Steve a spoon, ‘No-one’s gonna miss us anyway and I got us almost everything we need. You should use those, though.’

Steve blinked at him, not able to follow what Billy said. A moment later, an arm reached out and pulled one of the cosy blankets around his shoulders. Steve felt his body stop shaking, only then realizing how cold he had been.

‘It didn’t seem very warm,’ Billy looked him over with bright eyes, ‘Nice, pretty – but not warm.’

He tugged at the blanket, tightening it around Steve’s body. Then, he got another blanket, placing it over his own shoulders. With the chocolate mousse bowl in his hands, he leaned back, offering it to Steve who scooped up a spoonful.

‘This should be nice,’ Steve licked some of the mousse off his spoon, ‘We still have another hour until midnight. Do you really wanna be out here?’

Billy nodded, ‘Why would I want to be anywhere else?’

‘Well, all those unsatisfied housewives in there will certainly miss you,’ Steve started to tap a rhythm onto his leg, ‘Out here it’s just me, and that can’t be who you want to start the new year with. You don’t even like me.’

Billy remained silent.

‘Okay, that was blunt. Very blunt. But I still don’t get it; yes, I got you away from your father for you to be my bumper. But now we’re out here eating chocolate mousse. It’s weird. Last year, I was waiting for the night to end so that I could escape the plans other people made for me, tonight I don’t know what to do with myself.’

‘I don’t think you need other people making plans for you,’ Billy’s voice sounded breathy, as if something agitated him, ‘and for my reason to be here: my new year’s resolution is to be less of a dick. I thought starting earlier couldn’t hurt.’

Silence fell again, enveloping them in the calm feeling of amicability. Steve licked chocolate mousse off his spoon, Billy lit another cigarette. They didn’t need to talk much.

‘Do you miss it?’

‘Miss what?’

‘Your relationship. The Wheeler girl. Do you regret breaking up?’

‘No. No, I don’t think so. In the end, both of us were better off without the other,’ Steve smiled absentmindedly, ‘she and Jonathan fit together very well. I was nothing more than her dream of being something she isn’t.’

‘What are you to yourself then?’ Billy turned his head to look at him, ‘Are you keeping yourself from being what you could be? A policeman, a good friend, maybe more? Who would you become if you stepped forward and did what you want?’

‘Couldn’t I just return the question?’ Steve met his gaze and held it, ‘Who would you be if you took a stand? What would happen if you told Hopper what your father does? I know, Billy, neither Max nor you are very subtle.’

Billy, who had flinched at Steve’s words, relaxed a bit.

‘I guess I would do whatever I want to do. Make something out of my life, turn a pile of shit into something worth talking about. I’d go around kissing people for kicks and their reactions. I’d eat breakfast for dinner and the other way around. I would buy Max a new

skateboard.'

Billy seemingly lost himself in thoughts. Steve sighed and sat up, one hand on the armrest.

'I think I would really become a cop. I'd start looking for someone who really appreciates this true me, not the doll presented to the world by my parents. I'd dream of a family of my own, of kids that I would show what it means to be loved and cherished...'

'Sappy!' Billy interrupted.

'Hopeful,' Steve retorted, 'Kids shouldn't feel unwanted, redundant or like pawns in a bigger game.'

Again, silence enveloped them.

At ten minutes to midnight, Billy looked up from his mousse spoon. His cautious look crossed Steve's, a hand came to rest on his.

'We should pour some champagne,' Billy said, 'Will all those painted birds come out here?'

'Onto the balcony?' Steve huffed out a laugh, 'No, they stay inside where it's warm. They might watch the fireworks but usually they do it from the dining room window. It's over there, facing the opposite direction.'

'Good,' Billy furrowed his brow, 'very good.'

He opened the bottle of champagne and filled the glasses, 'I think I should kiss you at midnight, pretty boy.'

A shudder ran down Steve's spine, he felt a sensation unknown to him, similar to the fluttering of his stomach earlier, 'Why would you want to do that?'

It came out nothing more than a whisper but Billy heard it anyway. He turned around, facing Steve with a seriousness in his expression that took his breath away for a second.

'I think you deserve to be kissed on New Year's,' Billy shrugged, 'plus

I think you are pretty. That is all the reason I need.'

Steve felt his cheeks warm, the hand holding the champagne glass shook and he felt the stuttering in his stomach again, 'Are you sure that's it?'

Billy grinned, 'Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe there is more and we get to find out. Isn't that exciting? Our own experiment for the new year.'

He guided Steve, made him stand up and pulled at his waist until he dropped into his lap, 'Why are you even wearing a fucking waistcoat?'

'I like it,' Steve looked into Billy's eyes, 'and I like your hair like this.'

Billy's hand came up to fiddle with a few strands, but Steve caught it in his own and squeezed it, 'Thank you for helping me out tonight. Thank you for listening. Thank you for seeing me.'

A church clock started to chime, inside the men and women gathered together to clink glasses and drink to the new year and good business. Outside, on the balcony, two boys did the same, clinked glasses and wished each other quietly a Happy New Year before setting the glasses aside.

Steve cupped Billy's face in his hands and let his thumbs follow the lines of the other's cheekbones. He remembered the fluttering in his stomach, only now realizing it to have been butterflies. He remembered Billy looking at him across the room. He remembered their talk on the balcony, the chocolate mousse, the champagne.

Then, he pulled Billy closer to press his lips on the others. A warm surge flooded his heart, filling him to the brim with joy. Two arms snaked around his waist, pulling him in, pressing him closer to the warm body in front of him. Steve smiled into the kiss, caressing Billy's cheeks and deepening the kiss.

There were fireworks. Chicago celebrated New Year's Eve, and so did

Steve and Billy on the balcony of a mansion both would leave as different people in the morning. Yes, they would sit in the back of the Porsche without talking, but their hands would be entangled. Yes, it would be a hard year for both of them, but now they had each other to fall back on.

The silence in the car would be a content one because Steve and Billy had found each other in a cold winter's night, brought together by the initial hope to shake up old ways. It would be Steve and Billy now, two boys waiting to find out what the new year had in mind for them.

**Author's Note:**

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